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## Electronic and Print: A Merger in the Making

Tom Gilson

*College of Charleston Libraries*

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# Electronic and Print: A Merger in the Making

by Tom Gilson (College of Charleston Libraries)

The evidence continues to come in. Maybe you missed a favorite author's interview on *Booknotes*? Well, point your browser to <[www.booknotes.org/](http://www.booknotes.org/)> to read that interview of **Shelby Foote** or **Doris Kearns Goodwin**. Suppose that you want to find out what's "hot off the press" from Que Publishing or want to take a look at the complete text of one of their recent how-to manuals. You can link to all that and more at <[www.mcp.com/](http://www.mcp.com/)>. A dictionary of environmental terms shows up on the library's shelves and conveniently the publisher has placed a spellcheck disc in the back sleeve so patrons can load it on their PCs. You just read a great review in the *New York Times Book Review* and you can't wait to buy the book. Well, you don't have to. Amazon Books at <[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com/)> will be glad to sell it to you online.

A symbiotic relationship is developing between information formats which is proving fluid and dynamic. Surprisingly, there seems to be room, not only for print and electronic formats, but for various combinations of the two. It is true that there are specific instances where one format is preferable over the other. An electronic resource certainly has the upper hand in the case of bibliographic indexing. No one in their right mind would prefer searching the paper version of the *Humanities Index* if an electronic version were available on the library's OPAC. And there is really no need for a \$2,000 workstation and a network to look up a standard industrial classification number.

However, it is also becoming obvious that the issue is not always print versus electronic. It turns out that these two forms of communication can feed and enhance each other in creative ways. Up to this point, the trend has been one-sided with the print world using the electronic to provide more access and exposure. However, there is some indication that there may be room for traffic in the opposite direction.

In the September, 1995, issue of *ATG* (v.7#4, p.42, 96). I reviewed *IFB Abstracts*, at the time a Web page produced by a group of librarians which provided access to English-language abstracts of the reviews of European reference books which had originally appeared in the respected German quarterly *Informationsmittel fur Bibliotheken*. In that review I said that *IFB Abstracts* pointed to "a whole new world of Web publishing which is opening up to reference librarians," and that, "the possibility of librarian self-publishing on the Web opens up a new dynamic for our profession."

Little has changed to alter that view. I still feel strongly that the Web can be an incredibly helpful tool offering new "publishing" opportunities for librarians to add value to the services they provide. However, it is also obvious that the Web is not a panacea for all our information needs. It has certain limitations such as lack of portability, occasional slowness of response and sheer glut. The Web is

a work in progress evolving in new and sometimes surprising ways. And, while it certainly has a major part to play in the information/publishing drama currently unfolding,

there may be one possible role that few had anticipated. This is where *IFB Abstracts* comes in. Looking at its development indicates that there has been a successful migration from a Web startup to a formal print publication. In short, the Web has served as a breeding ground for a printed reference annual.

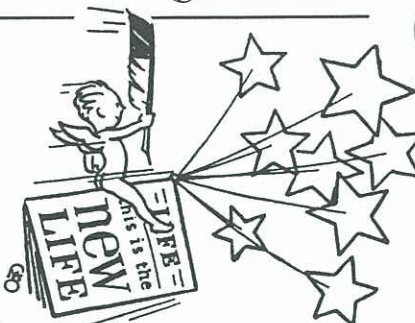
Evolving from a "frequently expressed need for a print version" of *IFB Abstracts* comes *Reference Reviews Europe An-*

*nual* published by the Italian publisher **Casalini libri**. (ISSN 1124-6332, \$24 annual subscription). *Reference Reviews Europe Annual* is a direct descendant of the Web page *IFB Abstracts*. *RREA* is an annual publication which has just issued its second volume and is planning a third. But what is also fascinating about *RREA* is that, although it serves to replace a Web resource, the Web still plays a role in its publication. There has been a format integration in which the Web version supports the "official" annual print publication which is seen as the finished product. As **Steve Lehmann** one of the librarian editors says, "the Web version can be regarded as a kind of a draft for the print version" while according to **Casalini libri**, the "numerous updates, editorial revisions, and other changes not reflected in the online version" make "the print version the authoritative form of publication."

In practice, abstracted reviews intended for *Reference Reviews Europe Annual* are posted quarterly and initially made available at Casalini libri's Web site entitled *Reference Reviews Europe Online* <<http://www.rre.casalini.com>>, which has absorbed *IFB Abstracts*. However, before being published in the authoritative *RREA* these online reviews are edited and revised. But more than this revision of reviews separates the print and Web versions. A quick look at the *RREO* Web site shows that the content and organization is different. Abstracted reviews contained on the Web site are not easily found in the print version and vice versa. According to Steve Lehmann, this may be a matter of editorial re-organization. "In preparing our first print version ... we felt that some of the abstracts would be more appropriately placed in other sections, that some of the sections could be consolidated, etc., so in some cases titles that might seem to be present in one version but not the other just may have been moved." However, Lehmann also points out that some of the abstracts contained in the Web version are, in fact, not in the print version because of their overly specialized nature and their limited appeal. Therefore, the *RREO* Web site not only offers new and updated reviews, it also serves as an archive for those abstracts that, for one reason or another, are not included in the final 1995 and 1996 printed editions of *RREA*. Additionally, the Web site serves as an archive for the 1994 abstracted reviews for which no print annual was published.

This novel combination of "authoritative" print annual and Web update and archive is a valuable resource especially for university and college libraries wishing to build their European language reference collections. It contains abstracts of a "carefully derived subset" of the reviews which appear in *Informationsmittel fur Bibliotheken*. These abstracts are briefer than the original reviews but convey their essential content being both descriptive in outlining the scope of the work and evaluative in commenting on strengths and weaknesses. The sources covered are mostly print sources like encyclopedias, dictionaries, bibliographies and handbooks, although some CD-ROMs are included.

Omitting both reference works published or distributed in the US as well as those which would be of primary interest to only German libraries, this work concentrates on European language reference works ranging in subject from philosophy and religion to business and economics. The overall arrangement for both print and Web versions is by broad subject categories which are



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erary information in a historical perspective that is not readily available anywhere else. The third series, *ABC-Clio World Companions*, focuses on the social implications of the topic addressed in the title, exactly the same as the first series does.

**ATG:** *Why are these titles being published as single volumes and no attempt is being made to unite works on similar topics into multi-volume sets?*

**TH:** Each of these titles is designed to stand alone, but by publishing these volumes in a series, we make it less expensive for librarians to purchase those titles they need.

**ATG:** *What about the future? Any new directions for ABC-Clio?*

**TH:** We're exploring multi-volume sets on topics that need that type of treatment. We recently published *Encyclopedia of World Sport* — a three-volume cross-cultural history of the origin and play of sports. Look for this type of multi-volume set from ABC-Clio in the future on a variety of topics.

As I've already mentioned, we're also concentrating heavily on developing interactive media. In the past year we instituted an Interactive Media Department and

have been developing new titles, such as the forthcoming *American Leaders* CD-ROMs.

We're also exploring new formats and markets, such as publishing reference books for the trade market and using our intellectual assets to develop textbook companions for the classroom. No matter what we do, we will remain focused on providing historical context on topics with anything we publish.

**ATG:** *This has been very informative for our readers, I'm sure. Thank you. Anything you wish to add?*

**TH:** I'd love to have feedback from librarians and vendors on specific types of reference books they'd like to see. Please contact me at <thallman@abc-clio.com>. Thanks again. 🐾

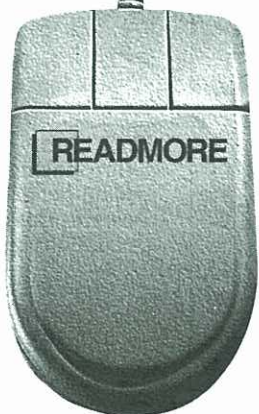
Contributing Editor **Ron Chapesiuk** is also Editor-in-Chief of *International Leads*, the international arm of ALA; a contributing editor to *American Libraries* and *International Library Times*; and serves on the editorial board of *Reference Books Bulletin*. He is currently under book contract with ABC-Clio to research and write the first encyclopedia of international drug trafficking and the War on Drugs

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classified using an alpha-numeric designation based on the scheme used in ALA's *Guide to Reference Books*. In the print *Reference Reviews Europe Annual*, each abstract is assigned a specific abstract number which is the number that actually aids the user in finding the entry. There is a title index but none for subject, although one is promised for the 1997 annual. (The Web version depends on the Netscape "find" command to locate specific entries.) Each entry lists the title in the original language and then in brackets, the English-language title. This is followed by the authors or editors, the place of publication, publisher, date, page numbers, ISBN, the price in foreign currency and in some cases the publisher's address and phone and fax numbers.

This combination of annual print publication along with Web archiving and updating is a good mix. It provides access to both timely rough draft and authoritative finished product. One wonders if this represents a developing trend or a blip on the screen. Only time will tell. 🐾

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